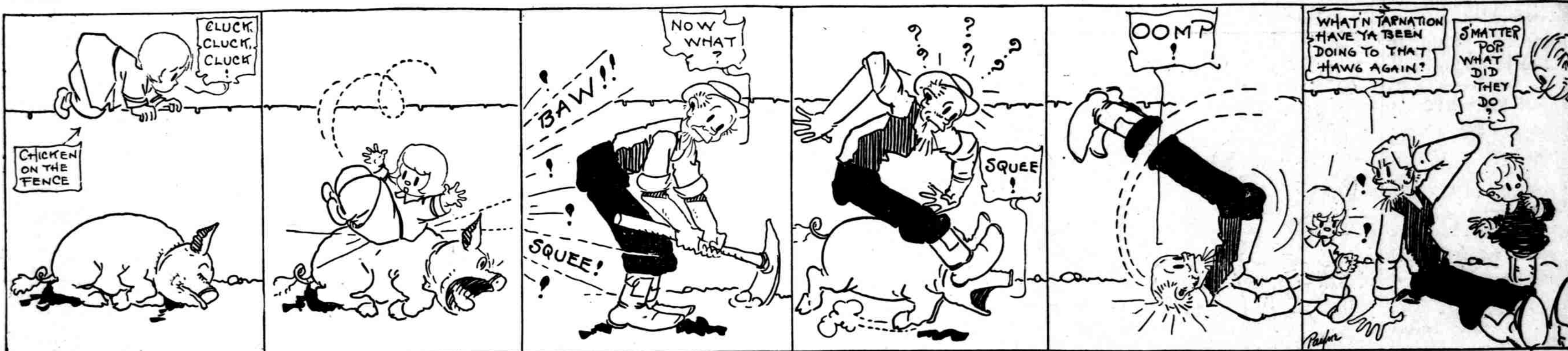


## "S' MATTER, POP?"

THE TIMES DAILY SERIAL STORY  
THE GHOST GIRLBy Henry Kittell Webster  
Author of "The Whispering Man"  
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## CHAPTER I.

## What They Found in the Ice.

WE didn't often talk about crimes in our family. Not, at least, about the mysterious, inexplicable crimes of violence that trumpeted their horrors at you every little while from the front pages of papers. When you have been there yourself, have seen names you know and love, pilloried there, you understand, altogether too well, how it feels to take an idle, curious interest when the thing happens to some one else.

But this present mystery proved an exception. It seemed so completely detached from all human motive, so devoid of the usual accessories of grief and agony and shame, that we found ourselves discussing it that night without reservation—Jack and Gwendolyn, his pretty young wife, and Madeline and I. If we discussed it with a sort of exaggerated nonchalance, which showed that really in the background of all our minds that other mystery still lurked and cast its shadow—the murder of the man who had been Madeline's husband and Jack's father—I doubt if any outsider would have been able to detect it.

But Jeffery, an outsider, and he has the most amazingly sensitive perceptions of any man I know. That was the reason why he can paint the way he can; can open up the innermost recesses of character in those beautiful, terrible canvases of his.

We weren't expecting him; didn't know, indeed, that he'd come back from his three-month vacation. And he might have expected that our surprise and pleasure at the sight of him and the warmth of our greeting would have waded everything else.

He didn't tell us in advance, so that we gave him no chance to answer or even to take off his overcoat.

But, instead of every trying to answer, he stepped back and stood looking at us, from one face to another, and puckered up his eyebrows in a puzzled frown.

"What in the world," he asked, "have all you people been talking about? There was something almost uncanny about it. Madeline gave a little shiver, and his wife stood looking at Jeffery with the level, thoughtful look of hers, and finally said:

"I'm glad I haven't any secrets. Could you keep your own, do you think, as well as you can read other people's?"

"I don't know," said Jeffery, "but it would be an interesting experiment to try. But what a perfectly detestable character you're giving me! I own I deserve it, walking into a roomful of people and asking them what they've been talking about."

"You know perfectly well," said Madeline, "that in this household there is no secret. You've earned many times over, the right to ask us what we have been talking about. But in this case it was not a secret at all. We were talking about the girl they found in the ice last month."

Jeffery looked puzzled. "Found in the ice?" he questioned. "Who?"

"You don't mean to say you haven't heard of it?" "The country's been ringing with it."

Yes, but I haven't been in the country this afternoon. Went straight over to the Atlas, got my fresh-water bath in three weeks, and came up here. Didn't even stop to read the evening papers."

"You're looking pretty well," I commented—"certainly a sight better than when you went away. You had us all worried."

It was fearfully unmanly of me," said Jeffery, "to run off that way without a word, but I suspect I did need a little rest. I've decided to go all in a minute. The decorators were at work there in the studio, and every time I went in to see the last of last I gave the key to my Jap and said, 'Sit down, I commanded him, "and light a pipe, and tell us all about it when you're here and what you've been doing."

Jeffery lighted a pipe obediently enough and settled down in the big chair which Jack rolled round in front of the fire for him, but instead of beginning his "Odyssey," as I had commanded him, he smoked in silence for a minute, then turned to Gwendolyn and asked:

"What about the girl in the ice? Oh, my adventures will keep!" he went on, "I started to protest. You will be hearing about them for the next six months. A returned traveler's a nuisance, anyway. Besides, you've whittled my curiosity. He good chap, Mr. Jack, satisfy it."

It was natural that he should have turned to Gwendolyn for the story. We all did that when we wanted the facts about anything. Her voice was so lovely in the first place, and she had a sort of sensuous pleasure just in listening to her. And then, when Gwendolyn told it, it was so good, so clear, so true, the truth unless you meant to be a liar. And yet, if you will stop to think, half a dozen people who you know are honest, and whom you wouldn't believe on oath, and if you're a lawyer like me, your difficulty would be the other way; to think of half a dozen whose belief absolutely and literally and without discounts or reservations. Well, Gwendolyn would certainly lead the list in my half dozen.

"I don't know where you were two months ago," Gwendolyn began, "and you may not have heard that we had a week of the coldest weather they have known here since they began to keep the records. The thermometer stayed below zero for six days. Most of the time it was a long way below. It came very suddenly, so that the river, which had been entirely open, froze within that week over eight inches deep, and the ice began cutting.

"It was early in January, about the 10th, I think, that an ice-cutter at Silver Springs discovered a body frozen in the ice. It was a girl—a young woman somewhere in her twenties. Even in the pictures they took of her she was very, very beautiful. And she must have been really—well, one can imagine it! Because, you see, the body wasn't changed at all. It had frozen just exactly as it was, probably within a few hours after it had been put in the water."

"Been put?" echoed Jeffery. "Then she hadn't drowned herself?"

"No," said Gwendolyn, "it was murder. She had been shot through the heart."

"Still," interrupted Jeffery, "why murder? Why not suicide with the revolver and a tumble into the river?"

"It was murder," said I, for Gwendolyn had hesitated over the horror of the thing.

"No powder marks around the wound, I suppose," suggested Jeffery. "Shot from a distance."

"How was she dressed?" he concluded. He turned to Gwendolyn with that question.

"That's one of the weirdest things about it," said Gwendolyn. "She was in evening dress, dressed as if for a ball, and her hair—perfectly wonderful hair, it must have been from the picture—was done that way, too."

"And they haven't identified her?" questioned Jeffery. "If the body was lying in perfect condition—"

"It was," said Gwendolyn. "You could even see the pressure marks of the fingers on her fingers, they said."

"That points to robbery, doesn't it?" said Jeffery. "She'd have worn her ring to the ball."

"She hadn't been at the ball," said Gwendolyn. "At least, she wasn't in ball dress when she was murdered. There was no bullet-hole in the bodice of her gown and no stain of blood on the white satin. The dress was clean. In the same moment he saw the evidence wasn't robbery."

"I can't help thinking," Gwendolyn concluded, "that the murderer was committed by some insane person. Surely it doesn't seem that anyone in their right mind would have taken that risk and taken that trouble to do what, one would think, must make the identification easier."

"It is possible," said Jeffery, "that if he'd read the weather reports, he wouldn't have done it."

"The remark sounded pretty flippant to me, but I caught a sudden look of intelligence in Gwendolyn's eyes and saw that Jeffery had meant something by it. In the same moment he saw the evidence wasn't robbery."

"Assuming," he explained, "that the person was still sane, he might almost safely have counted on the current carrying the body away altogether and its never being found. And if he wanted to dispose of the dress at the same time, there was a good way to do it as any. But he didn't count on the ice. That must have caused him some pretty bad nights, should think, and days hardly better. It's perfectly extraordinary, when you come to think of it, that she hadn't been identified. There were pictures were published in the papers."

"Everywhere!" I exclaimed. "The country's been ringing with it. The one who dismissed the subject, 'that's very interesting."

"Well, a minute!" exclaimed Jack. "I can show you the picture. I cut it out of the paper and laid it away somewhere."

"Don't bother!" exclaimed Jeffery. "No bother at all." Jack already had his hand on the door.

"To tell you the truth," Jeffery admitted, "I don't believe I want to look at it. Let's talk about something else. The pictures are beginning to get a little on my nerves. Oh! it's nothing serious, he went on, seeing the look of surprise on our faces, "and no doubt it's still of me to feel that way about it. But—well, I mean it just the same."

"I suppose," said Madeline, "that you're loaded up with commissions after your vacation. You must have altered three or four feet deep, clamoring at your day door."

"I don't know," said Jeffery. "I haven't seen my business man since I came back. Haven't even been to my studio. But I hope to Heaven he doesn't get me any more commissions like the last one. You know what that was, didn't you? He turned to me. 'The thing I was at work on when I booted?' 'I seem to remember,' said I, 'that you were doing some work for Miss Meredith.'"

"The Miss Meredith?" questioned Madeline. "The same. The queer, rich, invisible Miss Meredith."

We all exclaimed over his last word. "Invisible? The what were you painting? A spirit-picture of her?"

The last question was Jack's. It seemed to me that Jeffery's little unpleasantly, for he gave a little shake to his head as one will when a fly is buzzing about one's ear.

"I wasn't doing a portrait of her," he exclaimed. "I was painting from a photograph, and a few relics and souvenirs what was meant for a portrait of a niece of hers—I think it was a niece—well, I understand, died several years ago."

"I know some men did that sort of work," I said. "It's rather a new line for you, isn't it?"

"Never before," said Jeffery, "and never again." Of course, they offered me a perfectly immoral price for it, but even at that I shouldn't have done it, except for the fact that I found the photograph they showed me rather attractive."

"Beautiful, I suppose," said Madeline. "That shouldn't be wondered at. They

RANDLE HIGHLANDS  
TO GET NEW HOUSESWashingtonians Put Up Modern  
Houses in Suburb, and  
Will Reside There.

RANDLE HIGHLANDS, March 25.—Washingtonians for whom dwellings are being built in Randle Highlands are J. W. Pumphrey and W. H. Crump. They will remove here when the houses are completed. Contractor S. E. Snyder, of Randle Highlands, has been awarded both contracts.

Mr. Pumphrey's house is being erected in Park street. It will be a modern, six-room house, to cost about \$10,000. Mr. Crump's dwelling will be built in Twenty-fifth street. It will contain six rooms and bath and will cost approximately \$8,000.

Randle Highlands has been promised a night collection of mail soon.

The Missionary Society of the Randle Highlands Baptist Church has elected officers as follows: Mrs. T. W. MacCubbin, president; Mrs. Martha Wil-

kins, vice president, and Mrs. R. E. Hudgins, secretary and treasurer.

Miss Don Alda Marsh, of Lewes, Del., is visiting Mr. and Mrs. Appold, in Twenty-fifth street.

Mrs. T. W. MacCubbin, of Q street, has gone to Baltimore, where she will stay with relatives for a while.

Arthur Henning has returned to his home in Naylor road after a six months' engagement on the stage.

Mrs. H. B. Hinson and daughter, Miss Maurie Hinson, who have been the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Mason, have returned to their home in Paris, Tex.

John Hohn, of Twenty-eighth street, who has been attending a convention of the Modern Woodmen of the World in Parkersburg, W. Va., has returned.

The annual election of officers for the Sunday school of the Randle Highlands Baptist Church will take place next Sunday.

Major Littlebranch  
Made Yosemite Head

Major William T. Littlebranch, of the First Cavalry, has been named by the War Department as superintendent of the Yosemite National Park to succeed Lieutenant Colonel Forsyth. He was named on recommendation of Secretary of the Interior Lane.

Major Littlebranch is a graduate of the class of 1884 of the United States Military Academy, and has had twenty-three years service with troops and two years of detached service.

Delegate From Hawaii  
Is Forty-Two Today

This is the forty-second birthday of J. Kuhlo Kalaniana'ole, the Hawaiian Delegate to Congress. He was born at Kolon Island, and was educated in the United States and England. He is a cousin of the late King Kalaniana'ole, and was employed in the office of the min-



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